

LINCOLN LORE

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EXCERPTS FROM LINCOLN'S MILITARY CORRESPONDENCE

In the atmosphere of Memorial Day these brief excerpts from Abraham Lincoln's military correspondence are timely:

I don't believe shooting will do him any good.

In my position I am environed with difficulties.

We must disenthral ourselves and then we shall save our country.

I guess he can serve his country better above ground than under it.

You fail me precisely in the point for which I sought your assistance.

I will not perform the ungrateful task of comparing cases of failure.

I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause.

General Grant is a copious worker and fighter but a very meagre writer.

Delay is ruining us, and it is indispensible for me to have something definite.

Save the army—first, where you are, if you can; secondly, by removal, if you must.

In considering military merit, the world has abundant evidence that I disregard politics.

In this you have a discretion to exercise with great caution, calmness, and forbearance.

I shall continue to do the very best I can to discriminate between true and false men.

It will neither be done nor attempted, unless you watch it every day and hour, and force it.

If the Lord gives a man a pair of cowardly legs, how can he help their running away with him?

I wish you to believe of us, as we certainly believe of you, that we are doing the very best we can.

I do hope you may find a way that the effort shall not be desperate in the sense of great loss of life.

The quicker you send, the fewer you will have to send. Time is everything. Please act in view of this.

Are you not over-cautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing.

Stand well on your guard, hold all your ground, or yield any, only inch by inch and in good order.

I sincerely wish war was an easier and pleasanter business than it is, but it does not admit of holidays.

I give you all I can and act on the presumption that you will do the best you can with what you have.

A right result at this time will be worth more to the world than ten times the men and ten times the money.

So much of professional military skill is requisite to answer it that I have turned the task over to General Halleck.

I shall at all times be ready to recognize the paramount claims of the soldiers of the nation in the disposition of public trusts.

The most interesting news we now have is from Sherman. We all know where he went in, but I can't tell where he will come out.

Instead of settling one dispute by deciding the question, I should merely furnish a nest full of eggs for hatching new disputes.

While I am anxious, please do not suppose I am impatient, or waste a moment's thought on me to your own hindrance, or discomfort.

Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.

I can only say that I have acted upon my best convictions without selfishness or malice and that by the help of God I shall continue to do so.

I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsake me.

My belief is . . . each knows something which the other does not and that acting together you could about double your stock of pertinent information.

Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon, and come to stay; and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time.

Experience has already taught us in this war that holding these smoky localities responsible for the conflagrations within them has a very salutary effect.

His (Gen. Taylor's) rarest military trait was a combination of negatives—absence of excitement and absence of fear. He could not be flurried and he could not be scared.

I have issued the proclamation, which, like most measures has two sides to its effects. What is evil in effect we are already enduring, and we must have the counterpart of it.

The Secretary of War and I concur that you had better confer with General Lee and stipulate for a mutual discontinuance of house burning and other destruction of private property.

While I am very anxious that any great disaster or capture of our men in great numbers shall be avoided, I know these points are less likely to escape your attention than they would mine.

Truth to speak, I do not appreciate this matter of rank on paper as you officers do. The world will not forget that you fought the battle of Stone River, and it will never care a fig whether you rank General Grant on paper, or he so ranks you.

All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

You are ready to say I apply to friends what is due only to enemies. I distrust the wisdom if not the sincerity of my friends who would hold my hands while my enemies stab me. This appeal of professed friends has paralyzed me more in this struggle than any other one thing.

What would you do in my position? Would you drop the war where it is or would you prosecute it in the future with elder-stalk squirts charged with rose water? Would you deal lighter blows rather than heavier ones? Would you give up the contest leaving any available means unapplied?

Actual war coming, blood grows hot, and blood is spilled. Thought is forced from old channels into confusion. Deception breeds and thrives. Confidence dies and universal suspicion reigns. Each man feels an impulse to kill his neighbor lest he be first killed by him. Revenge and retaliation follow, and all this as said before may be among honest men only.